

ment of the feather. We must therefore picture to ourselves the ancestors of the *Archæopteryx* as terrestrial Reptiles in the form of Lizards, having feet with five hooked and free digits, showing no other modification of the skeleton, but having the skin furnished, in different places, with elongated warts, down, and rudimentary feathers, unfit for flight, but allowing for further development in the course of generations.

Here I stop. Having made a very imperfect study of the original slab, which requires the most thorough examination, I have only been able to make observations based on inspection of its photograph. But I hope to have shown you that our fossil, unique of its kind, is worthy of the most serious study, by means of which a crowd of questions of the highest scientific interest may be solved. You will, however, find the wish I form very legitimate; it is that this specimen, when it leaves the hands of its present owner, may pass into the possession of an institution or museum where it will be accessible to all who wish to make a thorough study of it.

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XLIV.—*Description of a new Genus and Species of Owl from the Seychelles Islands.* By CANON H. B. TRISTRAM, F.R.S.

(Plate XIV.)

It is with somewhat of the feelings of a poacher unprotected by the new Ground-Game Act, that I venture to intrude on a domain so sacred as that of the Mascarene Islands, which Professor Newton and his brother have established as peculiarly their own, and which they seemed to have so thoroughly exhausted. But the temptation is as irresistible as a stray Falcon to a keeper in the close season longing for an excuse to discharge his piece; and I can only, in mitigation of judgment, express my hope that it will not be long before I receive a second specimen of my prize, wherewith to enrich the Professor's unique collection.

I have been lately in correspondence with a gentleman who was making a sojourn in the Seychelles from the

Mauritius, and who had sent me a few weeks back a series, nearly complete, of the birds known from the Seychelles. On 17th May I received from him by post a supplementary parcel, which left the Seychelles on 26th April, containing the skin of a freshly-killed Owl, which, although the eyes, brain and flesh of the wings and legs had not been removed, having been well plastered with arsenical soap, reached me in perfect order.

My correspondent in his accompanying letter informs me it is the first he had ever seen or heard of, though the inhabitants recognized it under the name of "Sciù," a name evidently adopted from its note, and not a bad representation of the cry of the Scops Owl. I have no further information than that it is from the wooded mountains of Mahé. The bare feet and tarsi, which protruded through the envelope, at once told me that I had secured a new species. This has been confirmed by a careful comparison with the species of the genus *Scops* in the British Museum and in the superb collection of Messrs. Godman and Salvin. In general coloration it closely resembles *Scops magicus* and its allies from the Eastern Archipelago, and *Scops rutilus* from Madagascar, but is much larger than the latter. Its closest ally, however, is *Scops nudipes* from Central America, in which species the tarsus is bare for half its length. It differs, however, from all other Owls of the Scops group:—(1) by the fact that its ear-tufts, if any, are only rudimentary; and (2) by its tarsi wholly unfeathered, excepting a narrow line for about a quarter of an inch down the front of the tarsus, while the back of the joint is entirely bare. And I venture to think that these differences entitle it at least to subgeneric, if not generic, rank.

This bird is especially interesting as being the first living species of Owl discovered in any of the Mascarene Islands, though the family was probably represented formerly in all of them. We know, however, only of one species—the *Carine murivora* of Rodriguez, of which the memory has been preserved by Leguat, and of which the bones have been so beautifully figured in the recent volume (168) of the

‘Philosophical Transactions’ by Messrs. Günther and E. Newton. It is an interesting speculation what may have been the affinities between the Owl of Rodriguez and that of Seychelles; and we may hope that the acquisition of a skeleton of the latter will enable us to solve the problem. Meanwhile it is worthy of note that Messrs. Günther and E. Newton repeatedly remark on various points of affinity between *Carine murivora* and the genus *Scops*. They state that it shows a combination of osteological characters not found in any of numerous skeletons of Striges with which they have compared it. The form of the pelvis differs from that of all other Owls, and in one point resembles *Scops rutilus*, to which our bird bears a strong superficial resemblance. Again, there are modifications in the foramina for the sacral nerves, which closely resemble those of *Scops rutilus*. Then, again, the length and strength of its legs is greater in proportion to its size than in any other species of Owls. The strength and massiveness of the tarsus and foot in our new species is one of its most striking characteristics. It is surely, then, not improbable that further knowledge of its anatomical structure may enable us to group the species of the two islands together, and that *Carine murivora* may prove to be another species of our proposed genus. I venture to propose for this bird the name of *Gymnoscops insularis*, nov. gen. et spec.

Gymnoscops, nov. genus.

Ear-tufts rudimentary; tarsi and feet unfeathered.

Gymnoscops insularis, nov. spec. Ex insulis Seychellarum.

Above dark chestnut; the feathers on the head irregularly mottled with black and pale fawn-colour; the neck dappled with black and isabel-colour, but without any streaks; the feathers on the back barred with the same, and with black lines down the shafts, many of the upper wing-coverts having their outer web light isabel-colour; the secondaries with the shafts black and ribbed with sandy rufous towards the outer edge of both webs; the primaries brown-black on the inner web, and barred with various shades of chestnut

and buff on the outer, very feeble towards the tips, which are mottled on both webs with brown and chestnut; the tail brown, thickly mottled, and faintly barred with chestnut; lores and sides of face very light chestnut, the feathers delicately fringed with brown; basal plumes black-tipped; ear-tufts rudimentary, and scarcely to be detected; under surface of the body light chestnut, richly mottled and irregularly barred with white, and arrow-shaped black streaks down the centres of the feathers; under tail-coverts buffy white, with a pale rufous bar near the end, and white tip; the under wing-coverts pale buff; the underside of the primaries dark brown, and the inner webs of the secondaries light buff; feathering of the legs short and close, of rich rufous chestnut and faint blackish bars and spots; tarsi very strong, and entirely bare, excepting a very narrow line of plumage for a quarter of an inch from the joint in front; the whole of the back part of the joint to the end of the tibia entirely bare; tarsi and feet clear amber-colour, and very strong and stout; claws brown at the base, black at the tip; bill horn-colour, with the tip of the upper mandible dark brown. Total length 9·75 inches, wing 6·8, tail 3·2, tarsus 1·4, middle toe with claw 1·45.

Mahé, Seychelles Islands, April 1880.

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XLV.—*Remarks on two Species of Halcyon.*

By E. L. LAYARD.

(Plate XV.)

HALCYON JULIÆ, Reich., from Anseвата, in New Caledonia. There must be some error here! It *must* be a young example of *H. sancta*. Our bird never has the inside of the wing white; in *H. julia* and *H. chloris* it is always so in the adults, and more or less so in the young. We have splendid specimens of *H. julia* exactly according with Mr. Sharpe's plate and descriptions, from Aneiteum, Tanna, Vate, and St. Bartholomew, New Hebrides—also *H. chloris* from Vate or Sandwich Island, which we believe is a new habitat; at least we have no record of the species being found so far





J. G. Kenlemans lit.

Hanhart imp.

GYMNOSCOPS INSULARIS.